

My Name is Lois Rosenwald, and when it comes to the issues of transition and transition services for those with Autism Spectrum Disorders, I consider myself knowledgeable. First and foremost, I am a mom to my 36 year old son with ASD, I am also Executive Director of ASRC (Autism Services Resources Connecticut), a position I have held for over 20 years. In that position I work closely with teens, adults and their families. We are the largest advocacy organization in the state around autism and offer lots of services to both individuals and families. I also sit on a ASD assessment committee that the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services put together around 7 years ago. Those on the committee have been working with this population for many years, in various capacities; our job as a member of this committee is to review records and make recommendations to the individuals, their families, providers, and counselors.

In all my roles I have seen hundreds of ASD adults who are living the consequences of not having had an appropriate transition plan in place in high school or early adulthood, when it is most important. They, like most of us, need a job, but schools have let them down and not prepared them for competitive employment. To add injury to insult, the only agency able to work with them on employment, the Bureau of Rehabilitative Services, often can't work with them because their agency mandate is to work only with those ready for competitive employment. Families truly don't know where to turn, they call us devastated.

We have a true crisis. School Districts are not doing their job! Instead of individualizing transition, many districts develop a transition program, and then fit everyone into the program, regardless of diagnosis, they operate as if one size fits all. Needless to say, outcomes are poor. The majority of ASD individuals graduating today are not ready for competitive employment.

Other Districts totally ignore the fact that a transition program is needed and recommended under IDEA. They have been ignoring the need to prepare our students for what comes next; adulthood, and whenever possible independence.

Most of our ASD students, can work and live independently, if prepared, that's the true tragedy.

I often meet families when it's too late, after their students have been graduated out at 18 or 19, if they had been in touch with our Center before, we would have recommended they stay on and receive continued appropriate transition services till age 21, helping them to become much better prepared for the future.

Families are often beside themselves, wondering what to do. Only when they are out of the school system trying to find non-existent services do they realize they have a problem. They have been ill-prepared for this new reality. They can search for years to find help in getting their children prepared for adulthood, employment and independent living, hitting one wall after another, and, quite honestly, unless you have substantial resources you probably will never fully find the right help. We have real issues around capacity, we need to be training more than we currently are.

We have our state DDS Program that for the few who are receiving services it is extremely helpful, but we need hundreds more places to reach all the people in need. Remember, the CDC is saying 1 in every 88 have Autism Spectrum Disorders. Although our Medicaid Waiver Program is wonderful, it doesn't meet all the needs, and really can't play catch up at the level we would like to see.

We need to no longer ignore the critical needs of those with ASD. We need to come together as a state, and look honestly at the issues of this population, and make a commitment. Together, we can give them the opportunities they deserve and they will do the rest.